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ABSTRACT

This monograph defines humanistic and positivistic geography, explores the dichotomy between these two thought systems, and suggests how geographers can work toward creating a humanistic positivism. Positivistic geography is interpreted as being based on a concept of 'rational' man who perceives a single objective world which has only spatial characteristics and is perceived uniformly by all human beings. Humanistic geography is interpreted as a thought system which has emerged as a reaction to positivism's stress on objective space and rationalism. Humanistic geography--which is based on existential philosophy--is characterized by a focus on human thought processes, recognition of the importance of the interaction of people and the environment, and the consideration that all human phenomena must be analyzed without making any presuppositions about them. According to humanistic geographers, the world is subjective, complex, and full of variety, rather than objective, simple, and uniform. Ideally, the humanistic geographer investigates the world as it is, unlike the positivistic geographer who begins by simplifying assumptions about the world. Rather than reinforcing differences between these two approaches to geography, geographers should recognize the need for mutual compromise. For example, geographers can accept the basic focuses of humanistic geography on interaction of people and the environment and on the relativity of an object rather than its absoluteness and can, at the same time, recognize the importance of positivism's methodological sophistication in areas such as creating generalizations, theories, and models. (DB)

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HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION FOR HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

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HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION FOR HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

Humanistic geography is a thought system which has emerged as a reaction to the dominance of positivism in human geogrpahy, and particularly to the basic positivistic concepts that relate to the environment and to man -- objective space and rationalism. Positivistic geography, by negating the religious, metaphysical and social elements of human thought processes, has created a "rational" man who perceives a single objective world which has only spatial characteristics and is supposed to be perceived uniformly by all human beings.

Humanistic geography takes exception to such simplicity, with regard both to space and to man himself. Humanistic geographers have characterized positivistic geography as "geography without man" (Ley, 1980) and as "place and placelessness" (Relph, 1976). In their view, positivistic human geography has lost the linkage with man and his environment. Man has become a number in random number tables, and places have become locations on the edges of polygons or steps in an urban hierarchy.

Humanistic geography, which is based on the existential philosophy, starts from the idea that in order to understand the real human being, all theories and models about him and his relationships with his environment must be "bracketed". All human phenomena must be analyzed without making any presuppositions about them. Humanistic geographers also argue that man's actions have to be understood within their situational framework, that is,

man's experience with and awareness of the historical, social, and environmental contexts of his actions. The meaning assigned by man to various essences is to be found in an understanding of the sum total of his experience with the world within which he lives. The world thus becomes subjective, multiple, and full of variety, rather than objective, single, and uniform. The humanistic geographer first investigates all these worlds as they are, unlike the positivistic geographer who begins with simplifying assumptions about them. According to humanistic geographers, this approach avoids the major sin of positivism - that of imposing the conceptual and value systems of the researcher on the subject of his study.

Does the humanistic philosophy stand the test of scientific reality? Several lines of criticism, which have been reviewed elsewhere (Meir, 1979), can be raised against the idealism inherent in this approach. The first conceptual argument concerns the ability of the researcher to penetrate the thought of a human being in order to unravel the real meaning and significance he assigns to other human beings and his environment. The researcher cannot penetrate into private thoughts, nor can be reach their real meaning, because to do so he must involve his own personal concepts and values in the research process.

The second conceptual argument is that the actions of an individual, even if his intentions are different from those of other individuals, are not independent of them. This dependancy leads to a compromise in intentions and a narrowing of the gaps between them. The net result is a more unified world than that suggested by the extreme idealistic view.

The third argument against humanism is methodological in nature. There is a limit to the researcher's logistic capacity for conducting humanistic and comprehensive research capable of yielding generalized conclusions that contribute significantly towards our understanding of man-environment relationships.

Humanistic geographers themselves admit the limitations of their approach, and tend therefore to moderate the polarization between humanism and positivism. They recognize the inability of humanism to become a dominant paradigm in human geography. Indeed, humanistic geography has not become one (Talarchek, 1977). On the other hand, it can be regarded as a vital and dominant critical perspective on positivism in geography (Entrikin, 1976).

It may be difficult and perhaps impossible for geography to dissociate itself from positivism and still remain a science. A scientific discipline can develop only by creating generalizations, theories, and models, which are rejected and nullified by humanistic scientists. A divorce from positivism would imply an end to the process of generating a geographic language and vocabulary. Without the symbols and concepts which constitute a language geographers would be unable to communicate among themselves and with members of other disciplines. Such a lack of communication would result in a "cultural" scientific underdevelopment and laggardness compared to other scientific disciplines.

At the same time, however, geographers must ensure that their discipline does not drift back into sterile positivism. A bridge between positivism and humanism must be sought, recognizing the need for mutual compromise. One

possible path toward such a bridge in geography is to bring the discipline closer to the humanities. Calls for a move from the social sciences toward formal integration into the liberal arts are already being voiced (Mikessel, 1980).

It is not difficult to understand why geography, via positivism, has drifted toward the social sciences in the recent past. Positivism draws to a large extent from industrial and post-industrial urban development of the western world. This development, aided by the push to a mass culture provided by the mass communication media, has brought a gradual shift from cultural pluralism to cultural singularism. The individual human being "dissolves" into this framework and becomes a relatively unimportant element within the large system. The homogeneity of the western-style mass culture deprives the human being of the cushion, inherent in cultural heterogeneity, which can effectively absorb the social conflicts of class struggle. In the absence of the cultural cushion, in this state of monoculture, social conflicts become more severe and occupy a more dominant role at the research frontier of the sciences. Geographers justifiably become aware of the need to be aligned with the social sciences in order to participate in solving social problems.

This sole affiliation with the social sciences, however, especially prominent in the United States, is perhaps the main deficiency of geography. Under the influence of the social sciences geographers come to view the human being as being conditioned primarily by the external impact of the economic system, and less by that of the ecological environmental system or of the human personal and internal system. Behavioral geography has in

fact made substantial contributions in this direction, but only within the positivistic framework where the researcher determines a-priori categories of perceptual modes which are divorced from the situational context of the subject under study.

Thus, in spite of all the deficiencies of modern human geography, it is plausible to assume that positivism will remain its dominant philosophy. It is also plausible to assume, however, that these deficiencies will be reduced if that vulnerable flank - the geography without man -- is strengthened.

How can humanistic geography assist positivistic geography and geography in general? What is the value system inherent in humanistic geogrpahy which must be emphasized in education for values? The very question enables us to make a distinction, at a high level of generalization, between the value of humanism in general and the significance for geography in specific -- in other words, its significance to the human being and his relationship with his environment.

The first significant value of humanism, drawing from existential philosophy, refers to the Buberian "I - Thou" dialogue. Educators must teach the acceptance of the human "self," of the human being as he is -- and not as we want him to be; that is, we must view man to the extent possible, without any presuppositions about him. The basic fact to be recognized is that a man is a human being, and not an organism which can be observed and manipulated in a laboratory. We must appreciate and understand his value system, and above all emphasize his ability to learn from his own experience and to construct his own categories of perception and behavior. By severing him from his own

experience, as positivism seeks to do, we deprive him of all his cultural values. If culture is defined as the sum total of his accumulating human experience in all possible areas relevant to his life (Spencer and Thomas, 1969), then positivism has created a homo a-culturus, a non-cultural man. Positivistic geographers must recognize the cultural relativity in which man lives and marry the "homo economicus" with the "homo culturus."

The second significant value of humanism, related to the recognition and acceptance of the human "self," refers to his weaknesses. The industrial and post-industrial society emphasizes human achievement and his socially desirable traits. It is easy, therefore, to understand why modern geography, via positivism, tends to emphasize location in terms of optimization. Lack of awareness of human weaknesses is facilitated considerably by the alienation and eccentricity characteristic of the urban-industrial society. Humanism enables us to construct a different categorization of human beings, as basically composed of weaknessness and other traits with varying degrees of acceptance by society. After all, these are human beings who need understanding, protection, and tolerance, not only from those with decision-making authority on whom they depend, but also from those who provide the expertise and information to the decision-makers, namely, scientists in all disciplines, including geography. This emphasis on human nature must be built into the educational process from its early stage, as axiometic, and not only in advanced education.

Recognizing the importance of the personal experience and frailty of human beings, and combining them enables us to understand the meaning given

to the same object by different human beings. We can thus understand the differences in the meaning assigned to public housing projects, for example, among Los Angeles ghetto residents, and between them and residents of the Holy City of Jerusalem (Hasson and Aroni, 1980). The education process must emphasize the relativity of an object rather than its absoluteness. This relativity is a cornerstone of our ability to relate to one another.

The third significant value of humanism relates to the environment, and is of major importance in geography because it refers to the dialogue between man and his environment. Such a dialogue can be given two interpretations. In first interpretation, his actions take place within a specific situational context composed of internal as well as external circumstances, both of which have historical dimension of accumulating experience. Positivistic geography, following the economic optimal man notion, lifts man out of the real situational context of his actions. Humanistic geography argues that man cannot be taken out of his context. The educational process must emphasize this value of humanism in understanding human behavior.

The second interpretation of the dialogue between man and his environment, not dissociated from the situational context interpretation, is place awareness, or sense of place. To be human is, according to Heidegger (1958), to come to know and sense the place you live in. The place provides the human being with the external linkage of living and the internal linkage of being (the "self"). The place is the focus of geography, and geographical facts are facts about places. As Ley argues (1977), facts about places have their own personalities. Positivistic geography has sterilized the personalities of

facts by assuming the notion of objective and isotropic space. Instead of educating for the abstraction inherent in positivistic geography, we must educate for awareness of place and environment, for the relative meaning of place and environment, and not only for the geometrical relativity of space.

What is the meaning of education for awareness of place and environment? It means of course recognition of the relativity of the meaning assigned to place and environment. But most importantly it means a recognition of the fact that the place is not only the "where" of something: the place is the location plus everything else that exists there, that is, an integrated multi-meaning view of phenomena (Relph, 1976). The accumulated experience of man, that is his culture, is the product of the multi-meaning nature of phenomena in place, as assigned by different human beings.

Modern geography, via positivism, has largely severed man from his awareness of his environment. Man has been presented as having no appreciation of the environment. Modern geography thus argued indirectly that the environmental system is capable of functioning and solving its own problems. Man has failed to recognize one of the basic thermodynamic laws -- that every system is dynamic and tends spontaneously toward a state of disorder (Miller, 1975). By refering to an isotropic plain, positivism has in fact ruled away the reality of heterogeneity in environmental quality and the meanings attached to it.

The neglect by positivistic geographers of the relativity of environmental values is, among other causes, responsible for the current ecological crisis. Geographers are today beginning to recognize their sin, primarily via the humanistic criticism which calls for a revival of the immediacy of man's awareness of his environment and place. Place and environment are the main sources of man's cultural power.

There is a strong mutual relationship between placelessness, sense of place, and place (or local) roots, on the one hand, and the alienation of the individual in the urban post-industrial society, on the other hand. An individual who cannot identify or relate with his environment and place cannot identify with his society and culture, and vice versa. Therefore, reduction of social alienation can be facilitated by education in environmental values and awareness of the place and region within which man lives. Even the most modern approaches to regional planning today emphasize the importance of the population's territorial-environmental-local awareness (Weaver, 1978). In human geography, voices are being heard against positivism's neglect of regional geography (Guelke, 1977).

The way to achieving the goals set by humanism is still long and strewn with barriers. In any case our intention is not a shift from pure positivism to pure humanism, but rather to a humanistic positivism (Meir, 1979). The shift is a difficult process and involves a conceptual transformation which is difficult, if not impossible, for geographers to perform as human beings. In addition to their isolation as minority, humanistic geographers have problems finding their way and crystallizing their ideology and methodology. Their value is that they are aware of the limitations and problems of modern geography and its ability to understand properly man and his environment. They are making a genuine effort to open the eyes of the positivists, but most of us do not appreciate this attempt.

It is possible that the goals set by humanistic geography are idealistic and naive to some extent. But one must recall that all revolutions, scientific,

social, and political, have begun from idealism and moved to pragmastism. One can hope that the dialogue between positivism and humanism will create a valuable pragmatism with respect to geographical problems and the contribution of geography to education for values.

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